GHOST GIRL – A Series
By JG Faherty
Active Member HWA, SFWA, RWA, ITW, MWA

21 Roman Acres Drive
Garnerville, NY 10923
845-942-1198
JGFaherty@yahoo.com
www.jgfaherty.com

PITCH: iZombie meets Ghost Whisperer. Quirky, darkly humorous, and geared for the same audience as iZombie, Vampire Diaries, and Teen Wolf. Maya Blair is a Buffy for the spirit world.

LOGLINE:

Maya Blair is a typical 16-year-old girl with an extraordinary secret: not only can she talk to ghosts, but they become solid again when they're near her. Now she's fallen for two ghosts, and has to figure out which one wants to kill her and open a portal to the demon world.

SERIES OVERVIEW:

Maya Blair has always been able to see and communicate with ghosts, but the only ghost she knew was her grandmother's. Now things have changed. She's dating a ghost, Blake Hennessy. And another ghost, Gavin Hamlin, tried to kill her so he could use her blood to bring himself back to life. Only her quirky, racy best friend Lucy and her ex-boyfriend Stuart know her secret.

Ghosts of Coronado Bay will be an episodic series that follows the life of Maya Blair, a teenager who has the ability to not only see and hear ghosts, but when they are close to her they regain solid form and can interact with other humans. Each episode will deal with a mystery or problem Maya and her friends have to resolve, whether at a personal level or for other people or even to save the world.

There will be single-series stories and also interweaving plot lines, such as Maya struggling whether to stay a virgin or not, whether to continue dating Blake when they have no future together, and what to do with her life after high school. In addition to the weekly struggles with ghosts and other dark forces, she'll face all the usual teen issues such as being accepted by her peers, school work, her family, and hot topics such as peer pressure, body concerns, and money.

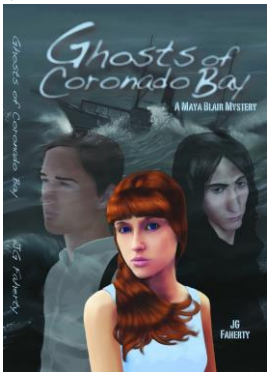
In the pilot episode, we meet Maya's family, including her dead grandmother, Elsa, who Maya speaks to on a regular basis. Elsa is the one who tells Maya she is a Seer, just like Elsa was in life. We also meet Stuart, Maya's ex-boyfriend, and Lucy, Maya's best friend. The two ghosts, Blake and Gavin, are introduced and become the focal points of the story as Maya first falls for both of them and then ends up with Blake when she discovers Gavin wants to rape and kill her. With the help of her friends, Maya defeats Gavin and sends him into another dimension.

In the second episode, Maya and Blake will be dealing with their relationship – should they have sex? If they do, will Maya lose her ability to bring ghosts back to life? Or will she accidentally bring Blake back to life and make him immortal? Torn between her love, her desire to remain a virgin, and the increasing pressure from Blake to make a decision, she opts to instead leave town and visit her cousins. Lucy comes with her, but instead of a relaxing vacation they end up in the middle of another ghost-related mystery when the meet a ghost in a local museum, one who guards the secret to a buried pirate treasure. Drawn into the conflict against her will, Maya has to call on Blake and friends to prevent her cousin from being killed when evil ghosts try to locate a hidden treasure map.

Future episodes will deal with a Revolutionary War secret, the death and return of one of Maya's school mates, and a new boy in school who creates problems between Maya and Blake. There will also be the ongoing concern over the missing book of spells from the first episode, and its eventual return for the series finale when once again it ends up in the wrong hands and Maya has to banish it from the earth forever, along with someone she cares about.

FIRST EPISODE SYNOPSIS: Ghost of Coronado Bay (2 part episode)

(Based on the Bram Stoker Award-nominated novel Ghosts of Coronado Bay)



Maya Blair is an ordinary 16-year-old, or at least as ordinary as a girl can be who is able to talk to ghosts. According to her grandmother Elsa, she is a Seer, and not only can she see and hear ghosts, but as long as they're physically touching her, they become solid, too. But since her grandmother is the only ghost she's ever known, the only thing her secret ability has been good for is having the occasional chat.

However, everything changes when the wreck of a sunken ship is raised up and exhibited in the local museum. Now there are new ghosts in town, the sweet, mild-mannered Blake and the darkly-handsome bad boy Gavin. Both want Maya's virginity, for very different reasons. Maya, unaware at first that they're ghosts, starts dating them both, much to the annoyance of Stuart, her jealous ex-boyfriend. Maya's personal problems unfold against a backdrop of bigger issues in town, including murders at the museum and Stuart's increasingly dangerous threats.

Just when she's made the decision to dump Blake and ask Gavin to the school dance, she finds out he's a century-old warlock who needs her virgin blood to complete a spell that will bring he and his men back to life so he can take over the world. He's already killed one local girl, and Maya is next on his list.

{{end of episode 1}}

Now it's a race against time as Maya, her best friend Lucy, and Blake, the boy who died trying to stop Gavin over a hundred years earlier, must find a way to beat Gavin again.

In the final showdown at the museum, Maya must use all her supernatural powers to put an end to Gavin and his evil book of spells forever. But he's got powers of his own, and he's already taken Lucy and some other classmates hostage. Maya finds herself unable to withstand Gavin's dark magic, until Stuart puts aside his anger and joins forces with Blake and Maya.
Maya is finally able to get the upper hand just as Gavin is about to open a portal to another dimension and let a slew of horrible, ancient creatures loose on an unsuspecting world.

With Gavin and his ghosts banished, Stuart no longer possessed by jealousy, and the town safe again, Maya finally gets the chance to actually kick back and just be a teen again, celebrating with her friends and Blake. She's still not ready to lose her virginity to him or anyone else, but for the first time, she's comfortable with her decision.

As they get ready to party, there's only one thing troubling her and Blake.

They never did find Gavin's book of spells.

MAIN CHARACTERS:

Maya Blair: 16 years old, with red hair and dark blue eyes. She has a tendency to be too serious, but wishes she could cut loose more often, like her BFF Lucy. Maya does well in school and works part-time at her family's diner as a waitress. Like most teens, she spends an inordinate amount of time on social media, her phone, and in the mall. She's been able to talk to ghosts since she was a little girl, but until recently the only ghost she'd ever know was her grandmother, Elsa, who was also a Seer when alive. Elsa has helped Maya handle this ability and keep it a secret, while also serving as something of a confidant and second mother, because Maya's parents spend most of their time running the business. Maya is also a virgin, which plays a big role in the plotline of the series, first because it's why Gavin and the other ghosts want her blood, and later because she is under increasing pressure from her friends and Blake have sex, both for social and safety reasons – if she loses her virginity, her blood can't be used for spells.



Lucy Patton: Also red-haired and blue-eyed, but a little shorter than Maya, bigger in the bust, and more goth. Lucy is fond of saying they are opposite twins - one dark, one light, one serious, one crazy. Lucy is a free spirit – not a school slut, but she's definitely no virgin and flaunts it at Maya to tease her all the time. She likes to party and manages to pull C's in school. She is the one who keeps Maya from becoming a total bookworm. But she's fiercely loyal and sticks by Maya even when threatened with death.



Stuart Newman: Stocky, football player. Maya's ex-boyfriend who has trouble with his jealousy and his temper. Maya grew tired of it and dumped him, and in the beginning of the first episode he's become something of a stalker because he thinks they belong together and she's cheating on him. But when he finds out about the ghosts and Maya's ability, and realizes the danger she's in, he comes around and ends up standing beside her and Blake in the fight against the evil ghosts.



Blake Hennessy: Borne in 1991 in Boston Towne. Irish-Scottish descent, slightly stocky, with freckles and sandy hair. He was the son of two witch hunters. He is stubborn but shy. He is simply dressed, in a white button down shirt and black pants.



Gavin Hamlin: Born in 1889 in Boston Towne. Irish descent. Tall, wiry but muscular. Died at around the age of 22. Arrogant, confident, and cruelly good-looking. Well educated for his time. He and his father were both sorcerers, and even in death he's continuing his quest to open a magical portal to another dimension. He dresses smartly in dark clothes.



SECONDARY CHARACTERS & SETTINGS:
Elsa Crompton: Maya's dead grandmother who speaks to Maya regularly.
Maya's Parents: Emily & Roger Blair
Mary Ellen Gordon and her cheerleader friends:
Anton Childs and Victor Fogg – Gavin's henchmen
Police Chief Clayton Finley – gruff, pot-bellied, family friend of the Blairs
Gary Wallace – Lucy's boyfriend in the first episode

Key settings will be the high school, Maya's house, the diner, the local pizza shop, the bowling alley, the wharf, and the beach. In the first episode, the Maritime Museum will feature prominently.

WHAT EACH HOUR DELIVERS:
The series will have individual episodes with beginnings and conclusions but also story arcs that continue through the season. The characters will grow and change, emotionally and mentally. Some episodes will take place in other locales, including New York's Hudson Valley and Salem, Massachusetts. The arc of the missing book of spells will drive several sub-plots, as will Maya's issues with sexuality and the changes that occur as they go from one level of high school to the next. Much like Buffy, Smallville, Ghost Whisperer, and Vampire Diaries there will be dark humor, teen situations, and some violence.

TONE:
The overall tone of the show will be a balance between suspense and dark humor. Coronado Bay is a small town but it is close to Boston and other metropolitan areas and the teens are very modern. Real life issues will play a role, as they do in all teenagers' lives to one degree or another. There will definitely be a feel of teens against adults.

About the Author: JG Faherty is a Bram Stoker Award and ITW Thriller Award finalist. He is the author of 5 novels, 9 novellas, and more than 50 short stories published in professional markets.

FIRST THREE CHAPTERS OF GHOSTS OF CORONADO BAY: (WRITING SAMPLE)

Prelude

Coronado Bay, 1908

The storm came out of nowhere, lashing the Black Lady with forty-mile-per-hour winds and rain that hit hard enough to leave red welts on exposed flesh. Captain Jonas Freeman shouted for his crew to pile more coal into the furnaces as he struggled with the wheel, fighting to keep the small ship aimed towards the relative safety of the coast.

Freeman swore at the weather, and his own foolish greed, as another gust of gale-force wind pushed the Black Lady farther out to sea. Under normal circumstances a river steamer such as his would never be out in open water to begin with, but the lure of Gavin Hamlin's gold had been too strong.

"It's only a few hours up the coast," the dapper young man had said, his cultured voice at once cajoling and filled with hidden danger. "Surely the Black Lady can handle some waves?"

Damn that evil-hearted dandy! Now they'd be lucky to make it to shore alive, let alone with the boat in one piece.

As if summoned by Freeman's angry thoughts, Gavin Hamlin appeared in the doorway, his shoulder-length black hair tangled and soaked from wind, rain, and sea spray, his long fingers gripping the door frame so tightly their knuckles looked like snow caps atop flesh-colored mountains. As always, his face held the same sickly-pale hue of a hospital patient.

But his eyes were still as black and deep as bottomless pits.

"Captain! How far from Boston are we?"

"Boston?" Freeman couldn't believe the man's one-track mind. "An eternity, if we don't find a shelter of some kind, be it cove or island. This storm'll smash us apart like a toy."

"What chance if we continue forward, that the storm will fall behind us?"

Freeman shook his head, wondering who the bigger idiot was, he for accepting Hamlin's offer, or Hamlin for not understanding the basics of New England weather despite living in the region all his life.

"None. Wind's blowing west to east, pushing us farther to sea. Storm like this one'll hang on for hours, maybe into the 'morrow."

"Damn it to Hell. All right, do what you can. But the moment the weather lets up, we continue north."

The tall man, hardly out of boyhood, disappeared before Freeman could reply, turning sideways so Benson, the first mate, could enter the cabin.

"I found a map!" Water dripped from Benson's soaked jacket as he spread a crumpled piece of paper on the desk. Once opened, it showed a surprisingly detailed map of the New England coastline. Considering the Black Lady had never been farther out to sea than the mouth of the Hudson River, Freeman thought it a wonder they even had any maps of the coast on board.

Maybe Lady Luck is with us after all.

"Captain, there's an island not too far ahead if we stay on our present heading. It's right on the border between Rhode Island and Massachusetts, twelve miles off shore."

"Aye, and naturally so small we'll be lucky as all get-out to find it in this mess," Freeman said, looking at where Benson's finger pointed. "But it's the closest thing to us, and our engines aren't strong enough to fight these damned winds. Full speed ahead, Mister Benson."

"Aye, sir." Benson hurried from the cabin.

Freeman stared out at the gale and tightened his grip on the wheel until his hands felt as if they might freeze there forever.

Half an hour. That's all I ask, Lord. Just keep us together another half hour, and I swear I'll never gamble or go whoring again.

He was still praying when the Black Lady struck one of the many rocky shoals surrounding Coronado Island.

As icy water filled his lungs and the screams of drowning men echoed through in his head, one final thought played over and over in his brain.

I wish I'd never met Gavin Hamlin. May his soul rot in Hell forever.

In the dark depths of the ocean, the Black Lady settled to the bottom in a cloud of silt and muck. The fish and lobsters, the only living witnesses, hurried out of its way.

In the eternal blackness, the spirits of the dead howled with grief and anger.

All except two.

Chapter 1

Coronado Island, Present Day

The late afternoon sun gilded the tops of the waves in gold as Maya Blair walked the wide, mostly empty sidewalk of Coronado Bay's Main Street. It was almost five, a time when the majority of residents were either making dinner or eating it.

Approaching the Bay Diner, Maya gave a low groan as she saw the parking area filled to overflowing, indicating yet another busy dinner shift. For the billionth time, she wished her parents hadn't decided to give up their regular jobs and buy the diner five years ago. Not that she begrudged their following their dream, but their owning the diner meant she had to work there too, and waiting tables most certainly wasn't her dream.

Of course, the odds were pretty good that even if they hadn't owned the diner, she'd have ended up waitressing there or working nights and weekends at the Gap, like her best friend Lucy.

Not like there's a lot of jobs to choose from when you live on a one-town island. At least I don't have to worry about getting fired.

Entering the diner was like entering her second home. The delicious smells of her mother's homemade recipes mixed well with the standard odors of coffee, hot grease, and frying hamburgers. Swirled and tossed around by the overhead fans, the rich, homey goodness twisted between the tables and booths, swept past the long counter, and exited through the doors and exhaust system to the outside, where they served as free advertising, beckoning people to come in and stay a while.

Meatloaf, stuffed cabbage, eggplant parmigiana, beef stew. She'd have known what was cooking even if she didn't know the Thursday specials by heart.

"Maya!" her mother's voice came, loud and anxious. "Hurry up and grab an apron! Tessa called in sick again."

Crap. Maya waved a hand to let her mother know she'd heard her, and then ducked into the storage room and pulled a black apron off a rack. Tessa Farr had a habit of calling in sick at the worst times. She always made up the hours, but in the meantime it meant Maya and Jessica, the other full-time waitress, would have to handle the rush themselves.

No sooner had she tied on her apron than her father rang the bell at the kitchen window, indicating another order needed fast delivery. "Order up!"

"Got it," Maya said, grabbing the two plates of eggplant and pasta.

"Table seventeen," Jessica shouted from where she stood by a booth, taking someone's order.

Maya hurried through the obstacle course of tables and chairs and delivered the dinners to two old men. One of them had the local newspaper open on the table, and she caught a glimpse of the headline.

"Museum to Open Black Lady Exhibit on Friday"

She smiled to herself. No need to read that article. The Maritime Museum, Coronado Island's only tourist attraction other than a few miles of stony beach and a supposedly haunted lighthouse on the opposite side of the island, was counting on a big opening day turnout for their new exhibit. Maya's history class would be there too, Mrs. Brackenberry having somehow managed to schedule a private tour.

Wonder how the old goat did that? Probably taught the museum's head curator a hundred years ago.

As soon as the words popped into her head, Maya scolded herself for the mean thought. Mrs. Brackenberry was a nice lady and a decent teacher. Just out of touch with the times. Seriously out of touch. Like, she'd need a time machine to get back in touch.

I think some of Lucy's sarcasm is rubbing off on me. Why couldn't it be her self-confidence instead?

While the idea of spending an afternoon staring at pieces of an old boat dredged up from the ocean floor didn't appeal to her in the least, it would be nice to get out of school for a couple of hours. At least they didn't have to tour the rest of the museum. Like every other person on the island, Maya knew the place nearly as well as the people who worked there.

Ding! "Order up!"

Maya sighed. Compared to waiting tables, even the museum sounded good.

* * *

By seven o'clock, Maya was sick to death of hearing people talk about the new museum exhibit like it was the greatest discovery since sliced bread.

If I hear one more person say they can't wait to see--

"I'm going first thing in the morning." A woman at a nearby table waved a forkful of meatloaf at the other two people sitting with her. "First thing. I cannot wait to see what they found inside that old ship."

That's it!

"Dad! I'm taking my break." Without waiting for an answer, Maya hurried through the kitchen and out the back door. Inhaling deeply of the warm September air, she leaned against the building and concentrated on her breathing, the way her karate instructor had taught her.

"In and out. Slow and easy. Each time you exhale, release some of your tension. Each time you inhale, picture calmness entering your body."

"Looks like something's got you upset."

Maya opened her eyes and smiled at the unexpected, but always welcome, visitor. "Hi, Grandma. Is it that obvious?"

Elsa Crompton, Maya's maternal grandmother, shook her head, making her gray curls bob like buoys on the water. "Is it that obvious, she asks? A person wouldn't have to know you for sixteen years to see something's troubling you. What's the matter?"

"I dunno." Maya twirled a lock of her own dark auburn - Lucy called it black cherry - hair around two fingers, a habit she'd had since grade school. "I guess I'm just in a bad mood today. All my friends are at the Lanes, and I'm stuck here. Plus I've got a ton of homework I still have to do, and the whole town won't stop babbling about a stupid boat exhibit at the museum."

Elsa patted her granddaughter on the shoulder. "Sounds like you're just being a teen-ager. Hormones, you know. They get all out of sorts at your age, especially when boys are around."

Maya gave a sarcastic laugh. "Boys? Ha. I wish that were a problem."

"What happened to that husky fellow you were dating?"

"Stuart?" Maya shook her head. "He turned out to be a jerk. The kind of guy who thinks he owns you, always has to know where you're going, who you're with, what time you'll be home. I told him we were through." Just thinking of Stuart Newman made her scowl.

"And how did he take that?"

"Exactly the way I figured he would. He accused me of cheating on him and said if he saw me with another guy, there'd be trouble."

"Stay away from him, dear. He sounds dangerous."

"You don't have to tell me twice. I plan on avoiding him like a convenience store burrito."

Elsa chuckled, and then her face grew serious. "Speaking of danger, I've been having bad feelings lately, like something is wrong in Coronado Bay."

"Is that like when Mom has a bad dream and then tells me I shouldn't go to the beach?"

"Just be careful, all right?"

Maya leaned up and kissed her grandmother on the cheek. "Sure thing. Thanks for stopping by and cheering me up. I know how hard it is for you to come here."

"Anything for you, dear. Have a good night." Elsa smiled once more and then faded from sight.

Feeling better, Maya opened the door and went back inside. Her grandmother's visits always cheered her up. She wished the rest of the family could still talk to Grandma Elsa, but the knack for seeing and speaking to ghosts - and, in Maya's case, making them temporarily solid by being near them - had passed from Elsa to Maya, skipping Maya's mother in the process. Grandma Elsa said it had as much to do with belief as natural ability, one of the reasons Elsa had made Maya promise to keep the secret of her ability to herself, even from her parents.

"Most people don't want to know ghosts are real. It would just make them sad or scared."

Not that there were a lot of ghosts to talk to or even see. Counting her grandmother, Maya knew of exactly one. Grandma Elsa said there were others, but they weren't as common as people thought.

"Only rarely does a person's spirit stay on after they die," Elsa said one time, back when Maya was only seven or eight and talking to a dead person still seemed so amazing. "Usually it's when a person is taken before they're ready to go, and even then the person has to be very strong-willed."

"Mommy told me I'm the most stubborn person she's ever met," Maya had replied. "Does that mean I'd make a good ghost?"

Elsa had laughed out loud at her granddaughter's question. "You'd make a great ghost, my dearest. One of the best."

One of the reasons Maya appreciated her grandmother's visits so much was because she knew how hard it was for Elsa to appear in Coronado Bay. She'd died in a car accident in New York, in a taxi on the way to the airport after visiting her brother. While it was apparently easy for ghosts to manifest - a word Maya learned way before her peers - near where they died, it got harder and harder the farther they traveled from their place of death. Grandma Elsa's visits rarely lasted longer than five minutes or so, and even then Elsa often looked fuzzy around the edges by the end.

It was hard to think of something composed of pure energy as getting tired, but it happened. Maya just accepted it and enjoyed the visits as best she could.

Considering the alternative, five minutes a couple times a week isn't so bad. Some of my friends never get to see their grandparents.

Her father's voice crashed through her thoughts like a boat plowing through waves. "Maya! Break time's over. I need a box of rolls and more coleslaw!"

Maya allowed herself a small groan and headed for the pantry. Rolls and coleslaw. Will the excitement never end?

* * *

The rest of the night stayed just as hectic as the first two hours of Maya's shift. By the time she left the diner at nine to go home and finish her homework, her grandmother's vague warnings of danger were long gone, pushed aside by thoughts of biology, Stuart Newman, and what to wear to school tomorrow.

Chapter 2

Kyle Forster and George Gibson grunted and huffed as they heaved a large coil of rope, thick as a man's wrist, onto a table. They'd spent all of the afternoon, and much of the night, putting the finishing touches on the Black Lady exhibit at Coronado Bay's Maritime Museum. The job was made more difficult than it should have been by the odd disturbances that kept happening, disturbances like the ones that already had the opening a month behind schedule. Dr. Bruce Griffith, who was overseeing the project, had let everyone know in no uncertain terms that he'd accept no more delays.

It was no secret around the museum that since the moment the remnants of the Black Lady arrived, strange things had been happening – lights flickering on and off when people weren't in rooms, boxes falling to the floor when no one stood near them, and tools that never stayed where you left them. And, things only got worse once Griffith's team started putting the exhibit together in the main exhibit room. Each morning, the staff arrived already knowing they'd have to pick up an assortment of display items that had fallen off seemingly level shelves and tables during the night.

After a while, the constant straightening of the previous night's unexplained occurrences started to wear on even the most laid back employees.

Dr. Griffith and most of the museum's senior staff chalked it up to a combination of clumsiness, old wiring, warped shelves, and possibly a small rodent problem. But several of the employees, especially those who worked exclusively on the Black Lady exhibit, had a different theory.

Haunts.

Some said ghosts; others favored poltergeists. A couple even talked about gremlins. But they all agreed something weird was going on, and it hadn't started until they'd opened the crates containing the remains of the Black Lady.

Now, as Kyle and George admired their handiwork, a box of water-stained, illegible documents slid off a nearby shelf and crashed to the floor, startling curses and exclamations from both of them.

"Damn! I hate when that happens," Kyle said, holding a hand to his chest.

"Ol' Griffith would probably say the shelf ain't level." George pointed at the offending piece of wood. "He'd be wrong, though. I measured it twice yesterday, and it's perfect. But that box keeps slidin' off."

Kyle shrugged. "You know what to do."

"Yeah." George took a roll of Velcro tape from his work belt. In order to end the time-consuming process of picking things up over and over, the whole staff had taken to using the tape to stick everything but the heaviest display items in place. Without it, they might never have gotten the exhibit open. Even Dr. Griffith hadn't complained.

"There." George gave the box a test push. It didn't move. "That's the end of it. We're done and outta here."

"And good riddance," Kyle said as they flipped off the lights and let the heavy doors swing shut. "I never want to spend another night here. Damn place gives me the major creeps."

The two men continued complaining as they walked down the hall, their voices gradually fading away until the only sounds in the exhibit room were the soft ticking of a wall clock and the ever-present groans and creaks all old buildings make in the night.

Five minutes after George and Kyle left the building, the ceiling lights flickered on and off several times, creating a strobe effect across the tables and cabinets containing the items salvaged from the rusted hulk of the Black Lady.

A figure emerged from the shadows, a tall, thin figure, moving with silent ease between the crowded displays. Several other men followed him.

"I thought they'd never leave," the tall man said, his youngish face looking older than its years in the dim glow of the room's emergency lights. "Start searching. Once the exhibit opens tomorrow, this place will be crawling with people every day, which means we'll only have nights to look for the key."

An older man, his shoulders hunched from years of manual labor, his pale face leathery and worn by too many years of exposure to harsh weather, shook his head.

"What's the use? Even if we find it, we've no way of unlocking the box and removing the book."

The thin man scowled. "Leave that to me. I'll figure out a way. I'll be damned if I don't get back what's rightfully mine."

The half-dozen figures spread out through the room, peering into cases, looking underneath anchors and hull plates and thick metal chains all pitted and corroded from over a century of lying on the ocean floor.

As the men carried out their relentless search, a seventh figure stood in the shadows of the doorway watching them.

Unlike the others, he prayed they wouldn't find what they were looking for.

Because it might mean the end of the world.

* * *

"I don't believe what I'm hearing. You're not going to the dance? You have to go. Everyone will be there."

Maya shook her head at Lucy Patton's incredulous look. "Not me," she told the girl who'd been her best friend since fourth grade. "I am so not going to be the biggest loser in the junior class. I'd rather stay home and watch television with my parents than go to the Homecoming Dance by myself."

"But you won't be alone. At least, not after you walk in. You'll be with me and Gary and everyone."

"Oh, that makes it so much better. Instead of being the third wheel with you and your boy toy, I can be the seventh or ninth wheel with a whole bunch of couples. No thanks."

Any stranger seeing the two girls walking home from school would have been forgiven for mistaking them for sisters. Both were average height and build, with blue eyes and hair down to their shoulders. On closer inspection, however, a person would see that Lucy's hair was closer to strawberry than cherry, and her eyes several shades lighter than Maya's. Lucy was fond of saying they were opposite twins - one dark, one light, one serious, one crazy.

No one that knew them disagreed.

A brisk wind shook the trees as they rounded the corner onto Franklin Street, the long road that paralleled Coronado Bay's Main Street and led from the school to the neighborhoods where Maya and Lucy lived. A few red and yellow leaves, harbingers of the approaching autumn, took flight around them, miniature kites zigging and zagging through the air.

With her usual pitbull stubbornness, Lucy continued her attempt to change Maya's mind. "You know, you could have had a date. All you had to do was wait until after the dance to dump Stuart."

"Yeah, right. Put up with more of his crap just so I could go to a dance with a guy who's suddenly decided that girls are supposed to be docile little slaves who do whatever their boyfriends say? What drugs are you taking? I want some."

"Very funny. Ha, ha, you should be on America's Got Talent. I'm serious. I want you there with us. It won't be the same without you."

"Well, unless someone decides to take pity on the ugly duckling with the psychotically jealous ex-boyfriend, methinks I'll be spending Homecoming in my room with a bottle of diet Coke, watching bad Tori Spelling movies on Lifetime."

They reached the corner of Dunes Lane where Lucy lived. "Well, I've got a week to change your mind. That's my mission."

Maya laughed. "Don't quit your day job. I'll call you after dinner."

"Later."

Maya waved goodbye and continued walking. She still had two blocks to go before Beach Street, where her parents owned a two-story Cape Cod that seemed to get smaller and more crowded each year, even with her brother Joe away at college.

"Maya, we need to talk."

The voice from behind startled her, even as she recognized it. She turned around and confronted the husky boy stepping out from the obscurity of a large tree.

"Stuart. I already told you. We have nothing to talk about. And, why are you following me like some kind of creepy stalker?"

Stuart Newman spread his hands. "'Cause waiting for you here was the only way I could get you alone. All I'm asking is five minutes."

Having dated Stuart for three months, Maya knew how stubborn he was, and that sooner or later she'd have to deal with the confrontation she'd been avoiding. "Fine. Five minutes. Start talking."

"What, here?" He frowned, his thick eyebrows dipping down until they nearly met in the middle, creating a giant, hairy caterpillar across his forehead. "Let's go to your house."

"It's now or never." She tapped her watch. "Time's a-wastin'. I've got a paper to write."

"Okay, okay. Geez, you can be such a bitch. Look, all I want to say is I'm sorry. I don't know what I did to piss you off, but whatever it was, I apologize, okay? I just want things to be like they were."

Maya took a deep breath before replying. There had to be a way to explain things to him so he'd understand, without causing another shouting match like the last time.

"You don't get it. The way things 'were' is exactly what I don't want. You were too possessive and waaay too jealous. That's why it'll never work between us."

Stuart's frown grew harder, and a red glow crept up from his neck and spread across his square face. "You know, a lot of girls would consider it a compliment that their boyfriend wanted to spend time with them."

Maya felt her control slipping. "Spend time with me? You wouldn't give me a chance to breathe by myself! You had to walk me to school, walk me to my classes, eat lunch with me, go to the mall with me, walk me to work. You got pissed off if I wanted to hang out with Lucy; you got pissed when I wouldn't let you come to my karate class and watch me. And, don't try telling my it was 'cause you wanted to be around me. You just wanted to make sure no one else talked to me."

"That's bull. I never said you couldn't talk to people!"

Stuart's voice had grown louder, and Maya found herself shouting back at him. "Oh, yeah? What about the time Chuck Henderson asked if he could borrow my homework, and you threatened to put his head through a locker?"

"Don't bring that up. That's different. It was a guy!"

"See? It's all about jealousy." Maya stopped, closed her eyes, and counted to five. When she felt calmer, she opened her eyes and looked at Stuart. Veins bulged at his temples, his fists were clenched, and a muscle twitched along the side of his jaw. Even though she could tell he wouldn't listen, she made one last attempt at rational conversation.

"Stuart. There're a lot of girls who like the kind of attention you give a girl. I'm just not one of them. You need to find someone who likes you for you. And, I need to find someone who lets me be me."

He stared at her, and for a moment she thought maybe, just maybe, she'd gotten through to him. Then, something changed in his face, as if he'd just learned his homework had been stolen.

"I get it now. There's somebody else, isn't there? If I find out you've been cheating on me--"

"Stuart. Grow the hell up. There's no one else. I just don't want to go out with you. Period. I'm sorry, but that's just the way it is."

Maya walked away, hoping he'd finally gotten the message to leave her the hell alone. She'd gone about fifteen feet when he spoke again. This time his words were cold, hard, and mean.

"You'll be sorry, all right, you slut. And, so will any guy I catch you with."

Maya turned around, alarmed at the threatening tone in Stuart's voice, but he was already gone.

"Great. School's gonna be a barrel of laughs tomorrow."

* * *

"I can't believe he actually said that! He called you a slut? You?" Even through the tiny speaker of Maya's cell phone, the eager shock in Lucy's voice came through loud and clear. "I know nuns sluttier than you."

"I know, right?" Maya had called Lucy right after dinner to tell her about the scene with Stuart. "He totally freaked on me. I've never seen him so bad."

"Is he doing drugs?"

Maya rolled her eyes. "Stuart? No way. You know him. No drugs, no drinking, no cigarettes. Gotta stay healthy for football."

"Maybe that's why he's so angry."

They both laughed, and then Lucy grew serious.

"What are you gonna do about him?"

"Nothing. What can I do, except stay the heck away?"

"What happens if somebody asks you out? You don't want Stu going Godzilla on some poor guy."

"Yeah, 'cause the guys are really lining up at my door to ask me out. That's one thing I don't have to worry about."

"Cut the Ugly Betty routine, Maya. This ain't ninth grade anymore. You're not fat, you've got a pretty face, and you've finally got boobs. Sooner or later some idiot's gonna ask you out."

"Ha, ha. Easy for you to say, you've dated three guys in the past three months."

"That's what happens when you put out, girl. Guys want to be with you."

"Whatever. I gotta go. I'll see you in school tomorrow."

"Later!"

Maya turned off her phone and opened her textbook. She still had math and biology to finish, and it was already nine o'clock. As usual, she'd spent too much time talking to Lucy.

Another late night. Oh, well. That's why God invented energy drinks.

Still, as hard as she tried, she couldn't concentrate on her math problems. Was Lucy right? Would she have a better chance of finding a decent boyfriend if guys knew she'd have sex with them?

An image came to her, of Stuart naked in her bed. Although she'd never 'knocked boots,' as Lucy liked to say, with Stu, they'd gone far enough for her to regret getting even that physical with him. She could only imagine how much worse his jealousy would be if they'd actually gone all the way.

And, what about the future? Would the next guy be the one, or another douche like Stu?

What if I do it with the wrong guy? I don't want to wait 'til I'm married, but I do want to be in love with the person who's my first, not lose it to someone who ends up being a jerk.

And that was the problem, right there. All the girls she knew didn't care about love. Most went with the three-date rule, and there were more than a few who had no problem hooking up with a guy on the first date, or even without a date. Some didn't even care if they went with a guy or a girl, or both.

Any port in a storm. Another of Lucy's sayings, after a night where she'd had a major hot and heavy with Amy Landhouse.

And, yet, I'm the one who gets called a slut.

Giving up on her homework, Maya turned on the computer. Maybe working on her blog for awhile would get her mind off sex and boys, or her lack of both.

* * *

Two hours later, when she finally turned off the lights and went to bed, she was still as aggravated, horny, and depressed as ever.

Chapter 3

"Hey, Maya, heard Stuart dumped your sorry ass. Maybe I'll ask him to the dance."

Maya looked up from her salad and found Mary Ellen Gordon and three other cheerleaders standing at the end of the lunch table, all of them wearing evilly happy grins.

"Go ahead, ask him. I hope he says yes. You'd be doing me a favor." Maya returned to her sandwich and her conversation with Lucy, purposely acting as if Mary Ellen wasn't there.

"Rumor has it he dumped you 'cause you were sleeping around. But we know that can't be true."

Maya clenched her teeth, but refused to look up. Don't give her the satisfaction. Don't--

"After all, everyone knows those legs have a 'do not open' sign in between them."

That does it.

"Better that than the revolving door between your fat thighs, Mary Ellen."

Next to Maya, Lucy snorted laughter and soda onto her tray.

"My thighs are not fat!" Mary Ellen dropped her tray onto the table, causing heads to turn throughout the cafeteria.

Lucy made an exaggerated surprised face. "No, and J-Lo's butt isn't big, either."

Mary Ellen's cheeks turned purple, and she took a step toward Lucy, but the other cheerleaders grabbed her. "Not here," one of them said. "You'll get suspended, and you'll miss the dance."

For a moment, Mary Ellen looked like she might ignore her friend's advice. Lucy stood up, and Maya joined her, hands at her sides but ready, the way she'd learned in karate. Maya counted five breaths, during which time no one moved. Then, Mary Ellen pointed a finger at them.

"This isn't over. I'm gonna kick both your asses when you least expect it."

Maya waited until Mary Ellen picked up her tray and the girls walked off before sitting back down. Immediately, Lucy thumped the table with her hand. "That was sooo cool! I can't believe you actually stood up to her."

Looking at her shaking hands, Maya said, "Yeah. Real cool. Now I've gotta watch out for them and Stuart."

"Bull. Mary Ellen's all talk. The last time she had a fight was in fifth grade." Lucy took a sip of her soda, let out a loud burp, and then frowned. "Do you think Stu's the one who made up that story about you banging someone else?"

Maya shrugged. "Him or one of his locker room buddies. If you'd asked me two days ago, I'd have said no way. But, after all the things he said about me yesterday..."

Lucy stood up. "You know what? Screw him. Serves him right to get all bent out of shape thinking that. C'mon, let's get going. We've got our museum trip in a few minutes, and I wanna grab a smoke before we go."

"You go ahead. I'm gonna pee and fix my hair. I'll meet you at the bus."

"Catch you in ten, girl." Lucy walked away.

Maya stared at the remains of her lunch and decided she wasn't hungry anymore. Damn that Stuart Newman! Even when he wasn't around, he managed to make her life miserable.

The only consolation was neither Stu nor Mary Ellen would be at the museum, which meant she wouldn't have to deal with either of them until Monday.

Maybe I'll get lucky, and they'll forget about me by then.

She smiled at her own wishful thinking.

Yeah, and maybe I'll meet the man of my dreams in the museum today, too.

* * *

For once, the bathroom was empty when Maya entered. After taking care of business and washing her hands, she brushed her hair and checked her makeup. She was dabbing on lipstick when someone said her name in the empty room.

Turning quickly, she found Grandma Elsa standing by a bathroom stall.

"Grandma! You scared the hell out of me."

"Sorry, dear. I didn't mean to."

"It's just that, well, you don't show up in the mirror, you know?"

Elsa nodded. "Is everything all right? I had a...feeling you were upset."

"Just school sh...er, stuff. Nothing major." Maya returned to the mirror, finished her lipstick, and then added some blush to cover the scattering of freckles on her cheeks and nose.

"Are you sure? I'm still getting a feeling that you're in danger."

Maya turned around and gave her grandmother a smile. "Really, there's nothing to worry about. It's high school, and a lot of people are jerks."

"Well, if you want to talk..."

"Nothing to talk about. At least not today." Maya kissed Elsa on the cheek. "I gotta go. We have a class trip in like two minutes. We can talk over the weekend."

Maya headed for the door, eager to get away before her grandmother could ask any more questions. Lying to a ghost was so much harder than to a real person, especially when that ghost knew you better than anyone else, including your parents.

Two girls came walking in as she opened the door, chatting on their cell phones and with each other.

Just before the door shut behind her, Maya heard their gasps as they watched the figure of the old woman fading away.

Laughing to herself, she hurried down the hall to the main entrance.

* * *

"...And, here we see a perfectly preserved mirror with an ivory handle. Notice the exquisite craftsmanship of the carvings. Something this expensive likely belonged to either the captain or a well-to-do passenger. Now, if you'll follow me to the next table..."

Maya tuned out the rest of the museum curator's lecture and wondered how much longer the visit would go on. Deciding to risk a glance at her cell phone, she stepped behind two taller students so she'd be out of sight.

Still another hour to go. I had no idea it would be so totally boring.

Next to her, Lucy sighed loudly and then feigned innocence when Mrs. Brackenberry turned and looked around.

After waiting for their teacher to return her attention to the rusty anchor Dr. Griffith was showing them, Lucy whispered to Maya, "Makes you wish they'd just left the whole freakin' ship at the bottom of the ocean."

Maya smiled. "What's worse, sitting in history class or spending the afternoon here?"

"That's like asking if you'd rather have your period or a stomach virus. They both suck."

Dr. Griffith raised his hand and waved to the group. "Now, if you'll follow me, we'll move on to the next case which contains a fascinating assortment of personal items from the Black Lady, including a pen and a man's pocket watch."

As the class shuffled forward, Maya caught a glimpse of movement in the shadows between two tall display cases. A boy about their own age, maybe a little older, stood there. Since she didn't recognize him from school, she figured he must work at the museum although he seemed to be paying attention to one particular table rather than to Griffith. As she drew closer, she saw his clothes were as out of place as he was: black boots, a worn, white button-down shirt tucked into black denim pants, and black suspenders. His blondish-brown hair fell across his forehead, almost reaching down to his eyes. Although not as big as Stuart or some of the other varsity football players at school, he had a husky build and looked like he could take care of himself in a fight.

Something about him piqued Maya's interest, and she sidled away from Lucy, working her way to the back of the group and off to the side, until she stood only a few feet from him. She glanced his way and smiled, but after a quick look in her direction, the boy returned his gaze to the table he'd been staring at.

Although she didn't consider herself a beauty by any means, the boy's total lack of interest in her surprised Maya and made her even more curious about him. Not to mention a little annoyed.

"Hi. My name's Maya. Do you work here?" She kept her voice low, so as not to attract Mrs. Brackenberry's attention.

The boy jumped slightly and turned to her with wide eyes. "You can see me?"

"Um, hello, you're standing in plain sight. I'm guessing you don't work here, then?"

"Er, no." As if remembering she'd introduced herself, he cleared his throat. "I'm Blake. Blake Hennessy."

"That's a cool name." Maya held out her hand, and after a slight hesitation, Blake shook it. His skin felt cold, and Maya wondered how long he'd been standing in the heavily air-conditioned room.

"So, if you don't work for the museum, what are you doing here?"

"I, um, I can't leave. I've got nowhere else to go."

Maya nodded. It made perfect sense. One of his parents probably worked in the museum, and he had to come here after school. That must suck, spending afternoons here. I thought I had it bad. At least at the diner I get to eat and drink, and I don't have to stare at boring old junk.

"I know how that feels. Are you new in town?"

He looked down at the floor and then up again. "I've only been here a few months, but it feels like forever."

Stifling a giggle, Maya nodded. "Yeah, Coronado Bay's like that. Look up 'boring' in the dictionary and you'll find our town. Where are you from?"

Another pause during which his eyes flicked back and forth like a trapped animal's.

Talk about shy. I've never seen a guy so afraid to talk about himself. Then, another thought came to her. Maybe he's afraid he'll get in trouble talking to me.

Just when she thought he might not even answer, he said, "Manhattan Island. At least, originally. But this is my home now."

"Lucky you. I was born and raised here. I've only been to New York once, and that was just for a weekend. My family owns the Bay Diner down on Main Street. It's open seven days a week, so we don't get to travel much. I've been to Boston and Cape Cod, too, but only for long weekends. We were supposed to go to Florida once, but--"

"Miss Blair! Please stay with the rest of the class."

Maya looked up and saw Mrs. Brackenberry glaring at her. The class had already moved on to the next exhibit. Behind their teacher, several students, including Lucy, were holding back laughter at Maya's predicament.

"Crap. Gotta go. Nice to meet you, Blake. Maybe we can...?"

Maya's voice trailed off as she realized Blake was no longer standing next to her.

Guess he really was afraid to get in trouble. I wonder where he went?

She hurried to catch up to the class, but her thoughts kept turning back to the mysterious Blake. For the rest of the afternoon she spent more time watching the shadows than paying attention to Dr. Griffith's lectures, to the point where Lucy had to nudge her several times and tell her to stop daydreaming.

No matter what displays she looked at, it was Blake's shy, earnest face she saw. They were almost done with the class trip when she realized something that made her heart jump.

I want to see him again.

* * *

Blake Hennessy watched from behind a heavy cabinet as Maya and the other students shuffled from one exhibit to the next, slowly following a convoluted path to the far side of the long room. A numb feeling still covered his thoughts like sailcloth as he tried to understand how the girl - Maya, her name is Maya Blair, and her family owns the Bay Diner - could see him, let alone hear him.

Or touch him.

The memory of her warm flesh on his, the first truly solid thing he'd felt since the Black Lady sank in Coronado Bay, still filled his mind. Even more amazing was the fact that when she was near him, he'd actually grown more solid himself, had been able to feel the cold plaster of the wall, the smooth wood of the cabinets, the tiles beneath his feet. The sensations were so overwhelming he'd barely been able to carry on a sensible conversation.

As the class filed through the exit doors, the loneliness of the past decades came rushing back, a feeling as cold and barren as the bottom of the sea, and one he'd grown too familiar with. He stepped out from behind the cabinet, his incorporeal body expanding to its normal size, and stared at the empty room.

I will see her again. I have to, if only to find out how--

"You look like a fish on a hook. Pray tell, what is so interesting?"

Blake jumped as Gavin Hamlin stepped up beside him.

"Nothing. I--"

Gavin nodded towards the far doors. “Peepin’ on the young birds, eh? Saw a couple of nice ones myself. Good enough to eat, right?” He slapped Blake on the back, and then slid his hand down, tightening his grip until Blake flinched. “Now, get your head out from the clouds and get back to work.”

Blake pulled free of Gavin’s hand, so thankful for not being caught with Maya that he forgot to watch his tongue. “I don’t work for you, Gavin. I’ve got nothing to do with your crazy search.”

Fast as a snake striking, Gavin backhanded Blake across the face. Although no sound accompanied the blow, the ceiling lights brightened and then dimmed, and sparks flashed from Gavin’s hand.

“You belonged to me the moment you decided to stow away on the Black Lady, runt. And, that won’t change until we’re all free. The sooner we find the key, the sooner we’ll be rid of each other.”

Rubbing his cheek, Blake feigned frustration and anger. “Even if we find your damned key, then what? We can’t pick it up. We can’t unlock the box to get your twice-damned book. We’re stuck with the Black Lady forever, and the only difference is we’re no longer at the ocean’s bottom.”

Gavin smiled, a nasty, malevolent twisting of the lips that carried no warmth. “That’s where you’re wrong, lad. Sooner or later someone will find the key and open the box. If not us, then one of the curators. Curiosity is a powerful thing. And if, by chance, they don’t open it, we’ll use our powers to do it ourselves. I will have that book. And once I do, I’ll restore our bodies and then...”

“And, then what?”

A look of pure madness flashed in Gavin’s black eyes. “Never you mind. Suffice to say the world will be a changed place. Now start looking.”

Gavin strode away, his black coattails billowing out behind him. Five men, the only other members of the Black Lady’s crew to remain on after death, materialized from the shadows and joined their leader in wandering through the exhibition hall, peering under and behind the items salvaged from the ship. Blake didn’t know why they bothered, except that Gavin would beat them senseless if they refused. They’d searched the room dozens of times, and Gavin had to know the key, if it wasn’t still at the bottom of the ocean, must be inside something, something they couldn’t move in their incorporeal state.

Incorporeal...

The moment he thought of it, his memory of Maya, and what she’d done to him, returned. She’d made him solid again. Would her power work on any ghost? If it did, and Gavin found out, he would find a way to keep her near so he’d be able to touch things. To move things.

To find the key and open the box, and the terrible book concealed inside it.

I’ve got to keep those two as far apart as possible.

Now that he had positive confirmation as to what Gavin had stored inside the box, he had to do whatever he could to make sure Gavin didn’t open it.

He couldn’t let Gavin get the book.

The world depended on it.